

2007

Montana Statewide Independent Living Council Annual Report to the Governor

Montana Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) Mission Statement:

To make independent living a reality for Montanans with disabilities by promoting and practicing a philosophy of consumer control, development of peer relationships and peer role models, self-determination, self-help, equal access, and advocacy in order to maximize independence, integration, and full inclusion of persons with disabilities into mainstream Montana.

Independent Living

People with disabilities want to live independently just like their friends, family, and neighbors. The independent living program provides them with the services needed to achieve their desired way of life.

In Montana, the independent living program provides individuals with a wide array of services including referrals to appropriate agencies; resource development; basic skills training; benefits planning; housing information; assistance with accessibility issues; and personal care assistance. In addition, the independent living program is involved with systems change advocacy to remove barriers that impede persons with disabilities from living independently. These services are delivered through the four centers for independent living located in Billings, Black Eagle (Great Falls), Missoula, and Helena. The centers collaborate with the Montana Statewide Independent Living Council and the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Program to address issues impacting Montanans with disabilities.

These services are supported through state and federal funds. The state dollars are currently being funded through the general fund. Funding independent living is significant because independent living serves individuals with all types of disabilities and all ages.



Statistics

Number of People Served in 2007

Total = 1,653

Served by Disability Category

(a person may be reported in more than one category)

Cognitive Disability	=	272
Mental/Emotional Disability	=	190
Physical Disability	=	766
Hearing Impairment	=	49
Visual Impairment	=	94
Multiple Disabilities	=	215

Most Frequent Services

- Information and Referral
- Self-directed Personal Assistance Services
- Advocacy
- Transportation

Most Frequent Community Change Achievements

- Legislative Collaboration
- Health Care Issues
- Transportation
- Disability Awareness

SILC Activiites

The SILC coordinated Montana's first Disability Mentoring Day for youth with disabilities. Thirty youth from across the state attended a series of events in Helena that introduced them to the benefits of employment with the state of Montana. The messages from several state staff, including the Governor's presentation, were inspirational to the youth.

The SILC coordinated two events during the legislature to help educate legislators on a variety of disability issues. One event featured the opportunity for legislators to have lunch with over thirty persons with disabilities from around the state. This afforded the legislators an opportunity to hear how various issues would impact people from the areas that they represented. The second event had table displays of various disability service programs to help legislators get information on programs funded through state funds. Also featured at the event were skits by the Same Difference Inclusive Theatre Company with a variety of messages on disability issues and obstacles encountered by persons living with disabilities.

The SILC coordinated a statewide video conference involving about seventy persons with disabilities who provided input on which disability issues should be a priority for the next legislature. Areas of concern that achieved the highest priority included:

- ***Implementing a Medicaid Buy In Program***
- ***Funding for Centers for Independent Living***
- ***Adequate Wages for Personal Care Attendants***
- ***Prioritizing Housing Assistance of Persons with Disabilities***
- ***Youth Transition Issues***
- ***Nothing About Us Without Us***
- ***Strengthening Local Transportation Committees***

SILC Members: Representative Carol Lambert, Chair - Broadus; Evelyn Pool, Vice-Chair - Lincoln; Dave Swanson, Secretary - Billings; Melodie Bowen - Great Falls; Gerald Hutch - Helena; Senator Gerald Pease - Lodge Grass; Robert Bushing - Billings; Evelyn Oats - Box Elder; Nickie Fee - Great Falls; Nicola Smith - Great Falls; Peggy Williams - Helena.

Staff Person: Mike Hermanson, Program Manager, Independent Living Services.

200 copies of this DPHHS public document were published at an estimated cost of 16 cents per copy, for a total cost of \$32, which includes \$0 for distribution.

To obtain this report in accessible formats contact disability services division at (406) 444-2590

Success Stories

Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow - Billings

A woman from eastern Montana with multiple disabilities including fibromyalgia, severe arthritis, and degenerative bone disease requested assistance in obtaining a toilet seat riser. Her conditions were progressive and over time forced her to cut back severely on the hours she worked, until finally she could no longer work. Eventually, she was unable to provide her own personal care. Her difficulties were compounded by having no family in the area to assist her. LIFTT assisted her to receive Supplemental Security Income and personal care services. These services allowed her to stay in her own home and avoid moving to a nursing home.

Montana Independent Living Project - Helena

MILP's Bozeman office actively assists persons with disabilities to access Bozeman's new bus service. By having staff on the board of directors of the new service and on the local transportation advisory committee, MILP was able to facilitate an event featuring introduction to the new buses, including accessibility features of the buses. In addition, service personnel answered questions about the new service. This resulted in several persons with disabilities utilizing the new service. On an ongoing basis, MILP has trained staff available to orient persons to the new system and other issues related to the effective use of public transportation.

North Central Independent Living Services - Great Falls

Job Service contacted NCILS to assist a woman with mental illness that was in jeopardy of losing her apartment, which she shared with her son. She had been unable to remain employed and was delinquent in her rent. Within two weeks, NCILS assisted her in finding resources to pay the rent for four months, which stopped the eviction process. NCILS then assisted her in obtaining Social Security benefits, including an appeal of an initial ineligibility decision. This provided ongoing income and allowed her to maintain her home, stabilizing a situation that could have resulted in homelessness or institutionalization.

Summit Independent Living - Missoula

In Kalispell, a young man in his 20's with diminishing physical and cognitive functioning due to Huntington's disease (a genetic condition) requested Summit assist him to obtain Social Security benefits. Summit was successful in assisting him attain the requested benefits. During this process, Summit staff found the man was also depressed, which had impacted the care of his apartment. The apartment had become unsanitary and unsafe. Summit found community resources to provide volunteers to clean up the apartment. Summit then arranged for the man to receive personal care services. He is now, he is living independently in his apartment and is even involved with community recreation programs, after nearly being placed in a nursing home.